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TAGS: [JO](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN ELECTIONS: "STACKED" DISTRICTS CREATE
CONFUSION

REF: A. AMMAN 4561
[1](#)B. AMMAN 4430

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador David Hale
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment. Candidates and voters are gearing up for election day after a smooth campaign season. The alleged transfer of voter registrations from one district to another has emerged as a major issue in the campaign leading up to Jordan's parliamentary elections on November [1](#)20. The logistical onus of transferring votes falls on candidates, who hunt down scattered tribal voters, fill out their paperwork, pay the fee, and eventually transport voters to the polls on election day. The problem with identifying this kind of manipulation is that it is technically legal when done for legitimate reasons. Some candidates assert that it is ineffective anyway. The government is taking a public stand against constituency transfers, but a lack of clarity about its own indulgence in this practice may limit the credibility of its reaction. Regardless of government actions, the King's unequivocal statements about the integrity of the process have created an overall aura of credibility and confidence in the system.

[1](#)2. (C) Despite the cacophony surrounding constituency transfers in the media and behind closed doors, it is evident from our discussions that voters and candidates still have an overarching confidence in Jordan's electoral process. This is confirmed by several polls compiled during the campaign period, each of which indicates a high level of confidence in the validity of the procedures in place. Every candidate that we have spoken with firmly believes that the King's multiple statements on the importance of free and fair elections amounts to a guarantee against manipulation by the government. While there is certainly a gap between the good intentions of the government and its mixed messages to the electorate, the net result of the current campaign season is the creation of confidence that will likely manifest itself on election day no matter the outcome. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)3. (C) As Jordan's parliamentary election season draws to a close, many observers are hailing the smooth conduct of the campaign season. For the most part, the campaign has seen heated but fair competition among a broad field of candidates throughout the country. On the margins of the campaign, there are heated debates about the tactics used by some candidates. Ref A discussed some of the other dirty tricks on display, including vote buying, mud slinging, and physical intimidation. Here we discuss the more basic issue of where voters will cast their ballots, and the widespread perception that certain districts are being "stacked" with voters from other districts.

"Traveling Birds"

14. (C) If the ample coverage of the media and the rumor mill is to be believed, constituency transfers are the most rampant form of electoral manipulation in Jordan. Nearly all of the candidates we talked to during the campaign season cited constituency transfers as a common practice that will result in skewed results in districts throughout Jordan. One candidate we talked to called them "traveling birds", and insisted that the practice is especially common among candidates whose support is based on tribal roots.

15. (C) A Balqa (central Jordan) candidate outlined in detail the process of constituency transfers for us from his own experience. The first step is identifying the voters (usually members of a candidate's tribe) who can be counted upon to vote. This is often accomplished during the season of tribal "caucuses," in which candidates vie for the honor of representing their tribe in parliament (Ref B). When far-flung members of a tribe come together to select their candidate, their contact information and district of residence is recorded by either the tribe or the campaign staff itself. The staff then filters out all of the voters who are registered in the "correct" district, leaving behind those who are registered outside of the desired district.

16. (C) Campaign staff then go about the logistically difficult task of finding voters where they are and assisting them in the process of changing their voting district. The candidate in Balqa sent two separate crews (one composed of men, one of women) to other places outside of his district where members of his tribe lived. One member of each team was a photographer who took pictures for the voter's new ID card. The others filled out the constituency transfer form on behalf of the voter, making sure that the information was correct. Once the teams gather all the forms they can, they

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are filed with the Ministry of Interior's passport office, which is responsible for maintaining voter rolls. The candidate pays the fee of JD 4 (USD 5.50) per form on behalf of the voter. The voter then receives a new national identity card that should have the name of the "new" voting district imprinted on it. Note: If voters do not have voting districts on their ID cards, they will not be able to vote. End note.

17. (C) As the Balqa candidate tells it, voters can transfer their constituency without any proof that they reside in the district. According to him, most Ministry of Interior functionaries simply believe that a voter resides in a district based on their tribal affiliation alone. Note: One Madaba candidate admitted to us that she does not actually reside in her own district. While property she owns there may technically make her candidacy legal, her actual residence is in Amman. End Note.

18. (C) The most difficult (and costly) part of constituency transfers is getting voters to the polls. When candidates assist voters in changing their districts, there is an assumption that the candidate will be equally helpful in transporting voters to the districts where they can cast their ballot. On November 18, media reported that taxi services were receiving a deluge of calls from candidates who were interested in hiring them out to transfer voters to their districts. Other candidates arrange for minibuses and fleets of private vehicles to transport voters to the polls.

Technically, It's Legal, When Done For The Right Reason

19. (C) The problem that candidates and government authorities find with constituency transfers is that they are technically legal. Voters regularly and legitimately transfer their voting district based on a change of residence. Other than the timeframe of the change and any other home ownership data that the Ministry of Interior may be able to cross reference (see below), proving that a

transfer was done solely for the purpose of stacking a district is extremely difficult to prove. Shaher Bak, head of the National Center for Human Rights, which is charged with "following up" on the progress of elections, told us that "constituency transfers are legal, because the law is vague." In the end, he said that "traditions are stronger than the law," meaning that tribal links will dictate the "legality" of most constituency transfers.

¶10. (C) A Madaba candidate complained to us that he was involved not in transferring districts, but establishing them in the first place. Many of his tribal supporters are nomads whose place of residence is not fixed - the voting district on their ID cards are blank. He simply helps them to find their proper district, which also happens to be the district in which he is running.

Does It Work?

¶11. (C) Several candidates that we talked to were dismissive of the effect that constituency transfers have on the outcome of voting. A Madaba candidate told us that "tribal votes tend to cancel each other out," and suggested that since all tribal candidates were involved in transferring the voting districts of their supporters, none would realize a concrete benefit on election day (but also, none can refrain from the practice without risking defeat). Other candidates admitted that they were involved in transferring the voting districts of their supporters, but dismissed the tactic as little more than insurance. A Madaba candidate whose support base was heavily tribal told us that he estimated only five percent of the votes he was looking for would come from transferred voters - probably not enough to make a concrete impact on who would win the race.

¶12. (C) The area that is impacted the most by constituency transfers appears to be Amman. Candidates in Amman told us about their frustration with finding city residents who actually vote there. An Amman candidate told us that the mere act of calculating the necessary votes in his district was massively complicated by the fact that many Amman residents do not vote in Amman. Another Amman candidate said that she had wasted many hours campaigning amongst voters who would ultimately cast their ballots in another district. "Most people don't even look at the district on their ID until election day," she complained.

Government Action and Reaction

¶13. (C) In reaction to the mounting number of news accounts

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and editorials on the issue of constituency transfers, the Ministry of Interior took action. On October 30, Interior Minister Eid Al-Fayez announced that the constituency transfers of 86,000 voters were annulled. Media accounts cite the minister as saying that the initial transfer of these voters was "a mistake" and that they were done "in violation of the law." The Minister stated that individual candidates challenged the transfers, which were eventually deemed illegitimate by Ministry staff. A contradictory statement was later made by government spokesman Nasser Judeh, who said that 86,000 district transfers were examined by the courts, but only 12,000 were annulled and only "two or three" were referred to prosecutors for further action. Ministry of Interior contacts told poloffs that the 86,000 annulled transfers were primarily in tribal/bedouin areas, where the closed electoral system makes it easy to determine false registrations because of the clear tribal names of voters required to vote in those three bedouin districts.

¶14. (C) A judge who serves on Jordan's electoral commission confirmed the annulling of the constituency transfers (without citing a number), but said that contrary to the

Interior Minister's statement, the transfers were declared illegal based on the cross-referencing of the voter rolls with home ownership data rather than candidate complaints. He also pointed out that while the transfers of constituency were annulled, none of the voters who were impacted by the decision was notified. The result will be that when these voters show up to the polls on election day, the voting district on their ID cards will not match the data in the Ministry's electronic database.

¶15. (C) Candidates are allowed to challenge the transfer of constituencies, but in practice it is very difficult to do so. A Madaba candidate told us that she challenged over one thousand specific names in her district, and was told informally by the Ministry of Interior that the names were purged. Still, since she had no official confirmation and since the Ministry has not released an updated list of voters, it is still anyone's guess whether the names were actually taken off the rolls.

Related Logistical Issues

¶16. (C) The lack of clarity on the part of the government when dealing with voter rolls has been the source of criticism from candidates across the spectrum. On November 6, Islamic Action Front (IAF) secretary general Zaki Beni-Irshaid criticized the failure of the ministry to publicly release the list of voters in each district for use by all candidates. He wondered about "the secret behind the government's insistence on not supplying the candidates with the final voter lists, although some candidates have already been supplied with these lists." An Amman candidate we talked to admitted that he obtained his list of voters in his district illegally through his connections as a current member of parliament, but defended his move by saying that in order to target the voters who were registered in his district he needed to find out who they were. Judeh told the media that the election law does not oblige the government to release voter rolls, but merely suggests it.

¶17. (C) A related issue to the question of constituency transfers is that of voters whose district is either not listed, or incorrectly listed, on their IDs. It is standard procedure in the passport office to leave the voting district blank when voters lose their identification cards and apply for a replacement. Voters who lose their IDs must then go through the process of "transferring" their constituency to the district that was on their previous card. One Amman candidate, an MP in the previous parliament, told us that when he lost his ID, he was given a new card with a blank district listing. Protesting the absurdity of not being able to register as a voter in the district he was representing, it took the candidate months (along with several angry phone calls to higher ups in the Ministry of Interior) to restore his district listing, allowing him to register as a candidate and vote in the district he currently represents.

¶18. (C) There can be no certainty on how all of this will play out on election day. The Ministry of Interior is employing a largely untested computerized system that will confirm the "true" electoral districts of voters. It is unclear, however, whether polling station managers (who ultimately have the final say in whether voters are eligible to cast their ballots in one particular place) will use the computerized system as the final word or defer to what is written on the ID cards themselves. This will likely be an issue for the large number of voters (either 12,000 or 86,000) whose constituency transfers were possibly annulled without their knowledge, along with the potentially larger

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number of voters whose IDs do not list a constituency at all.
Hale